

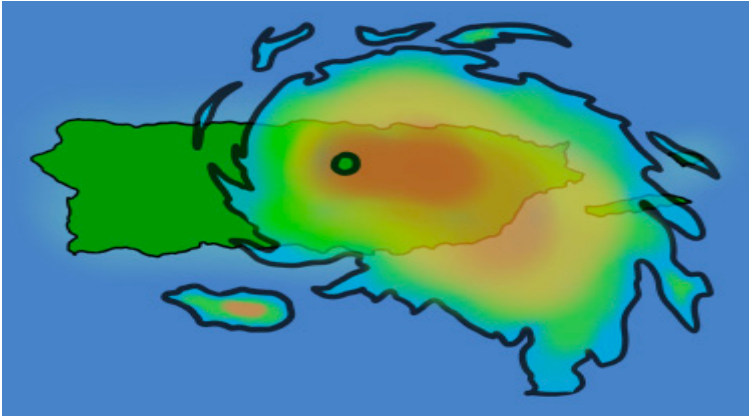
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Hurricane Fiona exacerbates Puerto Rico's electricity crisis



Vivi Smilgius
Beacon Staff

Illustration Hailey Akau

When she's not at Emerson, sophomore business of creative enterprises major Pamela Matos lives in Guaynabo, a rural Puerto Rican town roughly five miles from the island's capital, San Juan.

Guaynabo is among many Puerto Rican cities still suffering a loss of power in addition to flooding and property damage as a result of Hurricane Fiona, which hit several Caribbean islands—including Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Bermuda—as a category one tropical storm on Sept. 18. The hurricane hit Eastern Canada the following week.

As of Tuesday, an estimated 17 people died and another 12,500 were displaced as a result of the storm, according to Reuters. Many areas, including the entirety of Puerto Rico, lost all power. Now, more than two weeks after Fiona made landfall, over

100,000 residents have yet to regain it.

While Matos' family is safe, they are among many Puerto Ricans who spent days without water and electricity.

"Electricity lines as well as water [run] one way from [San Juan] to [Guaynabo], so if it's disrupted there's no other way for light or water to get into my neighborhood," Matos said.

Many blame the island's generally disliked and often-protested electricity distributor, LUMA Energy. Owned by Canadian and American companies, LUMA is Puerto Rico's only distributor of electricity. This recent privatization led to price hikes and weak, inconsistent service, particularly in the wake of the island-wide blackout caused by Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Fiona Pg. 2

'Fly So Far' reminds us to think about injustices in foreign countries

Samantha Deras
Beacon Correspondent

"We are guilty of the simple fact of being women."

This quote makes up just one of the many emotional scenes in the 2021 documentary style film about El Salvador's strict abortion laws.

"Fly So Far" that held a private screening at Emerson's Paramount Theater this past Thursday night.

"Fly So Far" follows the story of Teodora Vásquez, a Salvadoran woman who was convicted to 30 years in prison for having a miscarriage that the Salvadoran government deemed to be aggravated homicide.

In an emotional, raw, and powerful display, Teodora recounts the day in which she lost her baby. Working in the capital of San Salvador's city center, her labor pains grew so intense that she resorted to seeking emergency help. Teodora had her baby at work, during which she lost consciousness multiple times. When she awoke in the hospital in a weakened state to the news that she had a stillbirth, police accused her of aggravated murder.

With moving animations by Louisa Wallström and Roland Seer, Teodora shares about that night, "I couldn't stand the pain anymore, so I started making phone calls. 'My baby is about to be born,' I said. 'I can't stand the pain anymore, come help me.' The police said that they were coming. But they didn't arrive. My baby had to be born there."

Not only does the film comment on the inequities in Salvadoran women's reproductive rights, but it also highlights the harsh conditions of the prison system.

Teodora recalls sleeping on the floor her first night at the prison facility, and for the following 7 months after that. She shares that the food was terrible, the guards would hit her and insult her, and that there were only 7 toilets for 50 plus women.

She would cry herself to sleep and ask herself, "When will the truth be discovered?"

It was during her time in incarceration that Vásquez discovered the multitude of other women who were also unjustly serving time for having obstetric emergencies. They found solace in one another, using their sisterhood to overcome the feelings of isolation and distress. As Vásquez said, they became a "second family" to one another, especially since many of the women had children on the outside whom they were fighting for and missed dearly.

After serving ten years in prison, Vásquez became a spokesperson for this group of 17 other women – which later became 23 plus – who were wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for pregnancy complications.

Director Celina Escher, a Salvadoran woman herself, began the film after hearing about the cases of the 17 women and decided to go and visit them in El Salvador to hear their stories first hand.

"I asked Teodora about the idea of making a film," Escher said. "I talked to [her and the other 16 women] about why we wanted to make this film and why it's important that the world knows about all of these injustices and human rights violations happening in El Salvador. So then we started this journey."

Miscarraige, Pg. 6

Emerson Prison Initiative graduates first cohort of students

Maddie Khaw
Beacon Staff

On Mondays, Robb Eason's entry to his classroom looks a little bit different than usual.

Instead of entering Walker or Tufts building and tapping his ID, the Marlboro Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies scholar-in-residence goes through a series of security measures. He empties his pockets, removes his socks and shoes, and is patted down by a security officer before being allowed through the halls to his classroom.

Eason, a philosophy professor, teaches a course to individuals incarcerated at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Concord (MCI-Concord), a medium-security men's prison approximately 20 miles outside of Boston.

MCI-Concord is the site of the Emerson Prison Initiative (EPI), a program that allows incarcerated individuals to earn a bachelor's degree in media, literature, and culture.

EPI was launched in 2017 after founder and director Mneesha Gell-

man, an associate professor from the Marlboro Institute, brought the idea to Emerson. At first, the program offered a few credit-bearing courses to incarcerated students. Eventually, the students were offered a pathway towards a bachelor's degree composed of three courses in the fall and spring semesters and two in the summer, supplemented by study halls with volunteer tutors twice a week.

Now, five years later, EPI has graduated its first cohort of students, who were presented with their diplomas at a commencement ceremony at MCI-Concord on Sept. 27.

"EPI is about second chances and about the power of education—especially a high quality liberal arts education—to transform people's lives," Acting Director Cara Moyer-Duncan said. "We believe everybody deserves access to education, and that education can fundamentally transform someone's life."

Since its inception, the program has run two admissions cycles. The first cohort received 100 applicants, 20 of whom were accepted,

giving the program a 20% acceptance rate, while the second cohort received 50 applicants and accepted the same amount, amounting to a 40% acceptance rate.

Moyer-Duncan attributed the smaller applicant pool in the second cohort to a variety of reasons, including the pandemic, which limited EPI's ability to meet with students and introduce them to the program.

Once accepted after a three-step admissions process including an application, essay, and in-person interview, the students at MCI-Concord are enrolled at Emerson.

"They are Emerson College students, and their transcript looks just like the transcript of any other student on campus," Acting Assistant Director Stephen Shane said. "I think that's invaluable—to not only have their voices as part of our college and as part of our students, but also to show that Emerson is willing to invest in communities beyond the traditional campus model."

EPI, Pg. 3



Courtesy Ava Salti

Nothing but net: Women's basketball player becomes dual-sport athlete

Leo Kagan
Beacon Staff

For Ava Salti, sports are everything—more obsession than pastime.

With a quick glance into her dorm room, you'd notice a New York Islanders and Golden State Warriors jersey hanging on either side of her bed. Several more jerseys hang in her closet. If you talk to her for a moment or two, you'll feel her passion for sports oozing into every word she says.

That's why it's no surprise that Salti, a junior sports communication major and shooting guard for Emerson women's basketball team, is taking on a second sport this fall, committing to the women's soccer team as its newest goalkeeper.

Originally, the women's team anticipated two new keepers for the fall season, explained women's soccer Head Coach David Suvak. However, the summer saw both verbal commits drop the Lions, leaving the team keeper-less late into the recruiting process and scrambling for a replacement.

"My assistant and I started looking at the other female rosters here within the athletic department," Suvak said,

"to see if there was anybody who had goalkeeper experience. Ava popped up and we decided we would ask her if she would be interested to come out and play soccer."

For Salti, the decision was a no-brainer.

"I got a call from my basketball coach," Salti said. "We were talking about basketball and he was like, 'The women's soccer coach called me about you,' and he didn't need to say anything else. Right on the spot, I was like, 'I'm in.'"

Salti played goalkeeper in youth soccer, but due to a rule change enforced by the U.S. Soccer Federation—which required that teams be composed of players all born in the same calendar year—was forced off her childhood team.

"It just so happened that they called me up to varsity basketball that season," she said. "So I just rolled with basketball and sort of left out soccer."

Now, things are coming full circle as Salti joins the Emerson team as the second keeper, fulfilling her childhood desires.

goalie, Pg. 8

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News

Emerson Hillel reflects on Judaism in honor of Yom Kippur



Bagels and lox at Hillel's break fast. / Courtesy Bailey Allen

Chloe Els
Beacon Staff

Members of Emerson's Jewish community spent Yom Kippur thinking about the past. For some, reflections were personal and focused on lost friendships and new relationships. Others' centered around the Emerson community and things they want to see change.

Yom Kippur, or the "Day of Atonement," occurs 10 days after Rosh Hashanah—the Jewish New Year—and is honored by a 24-hour fast and contemplation on self-improvement in the year to

come.

In the spirit of reflection, members of Emerson Hillel, an on-campus Jewish organization, looked back on some of the more nuanced parts of being Jewish at Emerson. Rivke Goodman, a senior creative writing major and president of Emerson Hillel, explained how they define Yom Kippur.

"I feel like Rosh Hashanah is a deep breath in and a deep breath out, and Yom Kippur is what happens immediately after that breath," they said.

Goodman explained that Yom Kippur is an opportunity to separate yourself from the year before and move forward

in a more positive way.

"There is an emphasis on personal reflection and solitude, but traditionally in this time of year you are encouraged to reach out to people you might have harmed, whether intentionally or unintentionally," Goodman said. "And [asking for forgiveness]."

One of Goodman's favorite ways to reflect on the past year is through Tashlich, which takes place in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Tashlich symbolizes letting go of bad parts of the past year by tossing away bread crumbs.

"You take old bread or something that can decompose easily and throw it into a moving body of water," Goodman said. "It represents physically throwing your sins away."

Emerson Hillel hosted a Tashlich event on the Charles River on Sept. 27. Jordana Meltzer, a senior performing arts major and secretary of Emerson Hillel, attended the event and noted how Emerson students have made it their own.

"Traditionally, you're supposed to use bread for it, but bread is actually really bad for the ducks, so we used white broad beans instead," Meltzer said.

She explained that Hillel members first threw beans into the river individually, and then as a group, allowing them to consider not only how to improve themselves but their community, highlighting the need to face the changes they

want to see in order to grow.

This Yom Kippur, Goodman has been reflecting on their hope that students at Emerson will get to witness more of the positive side of Judaism.

During their freshman year, Goodman attended a vigil for a terror attack on a Boston synagogue. Goodman remembers student journalists trying to interview them for a class assignment while mourning.

"The professor wanted to teach [students] how to cover tragedies, but they were shoving their phones in our faces," Goodman said.

Goodman said this event made them aware of how acts of antisemitism are given much more attention than anything good happening in the Jewish community. In this next year, they hope to shine light on positive things happening in the Jewish community.

"There's so much cool stuff happening all the time," Goodman said. "I want it to be more of a celebration of life, rather than only covering things that are upsetting."

A sophomore visual and media arts major spoke to The Beacon anonymously as they wanted to be able to speak freely about their frustrations with observing Yom Kippur at Emerson.

"I'm from the Upper West Side of Manhattan—a predominantly Jewish community—so I'm not used to having to worry about missing class for Yom Kippur," they said.

They explained that, while

they have accommodations to miss class on Yom Kippur, it's tough for them to feel comfortable doing so because they know they will fall behind.

"If you want to celebrate the holiday, you have to make sacrifices you shouldn't have to make," they said. "It's tough and a weird reminder that you're not home anymore."

Abbie Langmead, a junior creative writing major, shared her favorite part of Judaism and how she has been thinking of it this Yom Kippur—a mindset she finds helpful in creating positive change.

This mindset is called Tik-kun Olam, and it is the Jewish philosophy of healing the world.

Langmead said she tries to follow this philosophy by participating in charity and activism. To her, this is less about faith and is rather just a way of life.

"I want to make the world the best place I can," she said.

At the end of Yom Kippur, members of Emerson Hillel gathered in the Student Performance Center Blackbox Theater to break their fast and enjoy a feast of bagels and lox. Many said fasting allows them to feel like they are beginning the new year with a clean slate.

"I'm excited," Langmead said. "I think it's going to be a year of transformation."

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Fiona leaves thousands without power, water

Cont. from Pg. 1

First-year visual and media arts major Ariana Sosa, who lives in San Juan, said LUMA customers' electricity bills are now double or triple what they used to be—and the service is worse. In July alone, the company increased rates by 17.1% in its seventh increase of the year.

"LUMA doesn't know the electric structure of the island, so it has become worse since they came into power," Sosa said. "They do sloppy jobs."

In the wake of Fiona, Puerto Rico remains at the mercy of LUMA. While Guaynabo resident and Emerson parent Lourdes Quintana regained power and running water a few days after the hurricane struck, she said others in southern and western parts of the island are still without it.

"LUMA is the only company that decides when we are going back to normality," Quintana said. "It's amazing how our power authority hasn't been capable of getting us electricity, at least, the power we need."

Near-constant hurricanes and severe weather have made it almost impossible for Puerto Rico's electricity grid to regain stability since Maria. Regardless of the weather, Quintana

and Perez said power turns on and off randomly in different regions of the island.

Viviana Garcia Roqueta, Emerson's Assistant Director of Student Affairs at Kasteel Well, grew up in Guaynabo and Cabo, Rojo Puerto Rico. They said the battle with LUMA is an ongoing one and expressed frustration over the long-term struggle between Puerto Ricans and access to electricity.

"Twenty years ago, it made sense for our electric system to be where it was," Roqueta said. "It's been 22 years. Our system should have improved."

They added that those who can afford it often invest in diesel-fueled generators to ensure electricity amid blackouts. While generators—an expensive and temporary fix, Roqueta noted—provide relief to a small number of people, diesel fuel is nearly unattainable in the days before a hurricane due to high demand.

Sosa predicted the island-wide blackout but felt anxious upon hearing about her parents' lack of running water. Watching from Boston as the hurricane hit her home was scary, she said, but she knew it wouldn't be as bad as Maria.

Matos was also in Boston when Fiona hit Puerto Rico. While she was sad she couldn't be home to support her family, she took comfort in know-

ing they were prepared. Boarding up windows and sandbagging areas of low elevation are common precautions taken before tropical storms to prevent property damage and mitigate flooding.

"In Puerto Rico, houses are old and weathered down, so maybe preparation won't stop your house from getting ruined or flooded, but it will help," she said. "Having an emergency plan... is definitely the best way to keep the anxiety down before a hurricane."

Many families are faced with an infrastructure still recovering from Maria and other storms. Quintana said that, from a bird's eye view, one can see many houses on the island have the same government-issued plastic roofs. These coverings were distributed five years ago to help people shelter after Maria and are still used in many houses today.

"Imagine those houses with plastic ceilings receiving Fiona," Quintana said. "This is our reality."

This reality is due in part to a lack of monetary and humanitarian aid. On Sept. 20 the U.S. government pledged \$60 million in storm aid following, but estimated damages tally "in the billions," Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator Deanne Criswell told The New York Times. The States' recent \$60-million promise

underwhelmed many Puerto Ricans, especially given the U.S. has distributed under half of the \$42.7 billion it promised the island five years ago in the wake of Maria.

Under the Jones Act, which limits the transportation of cargo from U.S. ports to U.S. owned ships, Puerto Rico can only receive aid provided by the U.S. government, which slows rebuilding processes and limits resource distribution. President Joe Biden temporarily lifted the act following Fiona, which prompted many to call for the end of the law altogether.

"We could get so much aid if it wasn't a temporary lift—if it was just lifted completely—but the United States makes money off disaster," Roqueta said.

Because of the slow distribution of humanitarian and infrastructural aid, Roqueta encouraged those who are able to donate to community service organizations like Techos Pa' Mi Gente, Taller Salud, and Casa Pueblo, which provide on-ground assistance to communities and individuals in need.

As Puerto Ricans work together to fix property and access electricity and water, residents also support each other emotionally. It was difficult for Sosa to be in Boston when the hurricane hit, as she wanted to be on the island to support her family and friends. Instead,

she found community in AMIGOS and comfort in outreach from the Emerson administration.

"I saw an email reaching out to Puerto Ricans about the hurricane," Sosa said. "It was cool to know the school was aware it was happening and affecting students. I found it really cool that they care for us."

Matos also received the email and felt grateful for the visibility Puerto Rico received after Fiona. While she's experiencing the hurricane from the continental U.S. instead of at home, she said it's nice to know she's not alone.

While they are currently in the Netherlands, Roqueta expressed gratitude for the community they have in Puerto Rico. They said not many people understand the reality of living through a hurricane and the community bonding that follows storms like Maria and Fiona.

"We have great neighbors and a big community that really looks out for each other," Roqueta said. "Everybody checks in on each other and calls everybody's family to make sure they know they're okay."

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COVID-19 positive students decry updated protocol

Olivia LeDuc
Beacon Staff

Students who contracted COVID-19 this semester feel “frustrated” with the college’s loosened COVID policies, specifically citing the “isolate-in-place” model that impacted how they experienced isolation.

After the Spring 2022 semester ended, Emerson updated its COVID-19 procedures on May 16. The college shifted to a symptomatic-only testing method, moved to an “isolate-in-place model” for positive cases, and dropped the mask mandate in almost all campus spaces—excluding the Emerson Wellness Center where masks are still required.

The policy shift, announced in April by Associate Vice President for Campus Life Erik Muurisep, cited the decline of local cases and consultation with Tufts Medical Center and the Boston Public Health Commission as the reasons for the updated protocol.

While the policies reportedly “fared well” over the summer, students who tested positive this fall are decrying the college’s approach to containing COVID-19 cases after they experienced an unhelpful isolation period.

“Isolating under Emerson’s new COVID protocols was overall very frustrating,” said Amya Diggs, a sophomore journalism major who contracted COVID in early September. “I don’t think that the school is taking COVID as seriously as [it] should.”

Diggs said she tested positive shortly after her roommate, Molly Howard, a sophomore theater and performance major, received a positive test result on Sept. 9. Both roommates isolated themselves in their dorm room in the Piano Row residence hall for five days in compliance with Emerson’s policy and CDC recommendations.

According to the college’s “isolate-in-place” model, a roommate of a positive student has the option of remaining in the room, or they can seek alternative housing “at their own expense.” For Diggs, this isolation method was “useless,” and she believes it subjected her to exposure.

In an attempt to limit her contact with Howard, Diggs said she initially moved her mattress into the common area of her suite. When she tested positive, she moved back into her room and isolated herself with Howard to keep her distance from her other suite mates.

“Making COVID-positive students room with their COVID-[negative] roommates makes no sense,” Diggs said. “I’m confident that the only reason why I got COVID is that my roommate had it and passed it on to me.”

Howard shared the same annoyances as Diggs with her experience in isolation and the risks of the modified policy, and was also concerned about potential exposure and sharing a living space with her roommate after contracting the virus.

“I felt completely abandoned



Beacon Archives

by the college and [its] new policies,” Howard said. “[Emerson] provided me and my roommate zero support.”

Additionally, the “isolation-in-place” policy guidelines state that COVID-positive students must isolate in their assigned living spaces or are “strongly encouraged” to return home or make alternate living arrangements. This encouragement by the college was inaccessible for Howard, who is not local to the area and was in “no position” to rent a hotel room for 10 days in Downtown Boston.

Diggs and Howard’s disappointments with the college’s relaxed isolation measures were also mounted with the instructions for leaving their room to get food. Students isolated in place on-campus are permitted to go and complete “necessary tasks” such as picking up food in take-out containers from Dining Services.

Howard said she was still infectious when she left her room to obtain meals, but as much as it was “uncomfortable,” she had no alternative.

“I ran into several friends

while I was still fully contagious who knew that I was sick and I could feel how uncomfortable they were,” Howard said. “I had no other choice.”

Diggs said she also felt uncomfortable leaving her room for food pickup.

“I was terrified of getting other people sick, especially since most students around campus aren’t wearing masks,” she said.

For Mike Riso, a junior theater and performance major who tested positive for COVID on Sept. 25, the most frustrating part of isolation was missing classwork.

“I do wish there was a bit more understanding promoted within staff in regards to missing classes due to having COVID,” he said. “As far as I’ve been told, it’s treated like any other unexcused absence, which I find pretty reductive.”

Emerson’s symptomatic testing policy switched from its previous testing strategy of mandatory weekly COVID tests. Students are expected to report positive test results by filling out the COVID-19 Self Report Form.

Diggs said the new testing policy, atop the other changes,

was a display of ignorance from Emerson.

“There’s no way that everyone is going to go out of their way to get COVID tested when they aren’t required to,” she said.

At the Sept. 29 Faculty Assembly, administration asked faculty to submit a record of students that said they are positive for COVID through the Share a Concern portal, an anonymous person familiar with the matter told The Beacon.

“I view it as a sign that the college has no idea how many students are getting infected and no idea what is the COVID positivity rate,” the source said.

While the college continues to monitor the current state of the pandemic and still follows CDC guidelines, students believe a more muscular response to COVID is necessary to limit the spread of the virus.

“The lack of testing students and holding [the Emerson community] accountable concerns me for future outbreaks,” Howard said.

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EPI grants second chances

Cont. from Pg. 1

The students in the first cohort who remain at MCI-Concord after graduation are enrolled in a noncredit economics course that Moyer-Duncan described as a “professionalization course,” in which they learn how to use laptops and the Microsoft Office Suite. The second cohort, meanwhile, can add a minor in economics and pursue a degree in media, literature, and culture.

While EPI does not stay in contact with individuals who are transferred to other prisons due to Department of Corrections policies, the program continues to support individuals who graduate from the program or exit the prison after completing their sentence.

EPI’s Re-entry and College Outside Program (RECOUP) provides resources to students who re-enter society after being released from prison. This support can come in different forms depending on each student’s needs, Moyer-Duncan said.

For students who exit the prison with degrees, RECOUP can aid in finding employment, housing, and food security, as well as opening a bank account and obtaining a driver’s license. If a student has not yet finished their degree, RECOUP helps with academic continuity, whether that means continuing the student’s education on Emerson’s Boston campus or at a different institution.

“We work with them to understand the best pathways towards continuing education for them,” Shane said. “That’s not the same for everybody. What do they want to study, what do they want to continue working to-

wards, and how can we help them do that?”

Some students, in the midst of earning their degree, are moved by the Department of Corrections from MCI-Concord’s medium-security status to Northeastern Correctional Center, a minimum-security facility, where they are still able to work towards their degrees and receive academic support.

“We wanted to make sure that if they get classed down to minimum-security prisons, they can still make progress towards their degree,” Moyer-Duncan said.

Because the program is funded by the college, outside grants, and individual donors, EPI students do not pay tuition. Moyer-Duncan said the program’s courses are equivalent to those taught on Emerson’s main campus in terms of rigor and content.

“That is really important to the integrity of the program,” Moyer-Duncan said. “The students are highly capable. They’re very, very engaged.”

Professors at EPI are instructed to conduct their courses in the same way they are taught on the main campus, Eason said.

“It’s not like this class is tailored to the [students] in a way that makes it less than a course I would teach at Emerson,” Eason said. “Not at all. In fact, I think they may even have a slightly more challenging class, insofar as they can’t reach out to me easily for extra help.”

Technology is the main area in which EPI courses differ from other Emerson ones, as students and instructors at MCI-Concord don’t have internet access. While students on

Emerson’s Boston campus use personal laptops to access course resources at any time, EPI students can contact their instructors only within the two hours and 45 minutes during which they meet once each week.

Eason said that while the lack of internet poses a challenge, his experience teaching at EPI this semester has been “wonderful.”

“The classroom is the most lively classroom I’ve ever taught in,” he said. “This is a class where every student is eager to be involved in speaking and talking and getting feedback. It’s really incredible.”

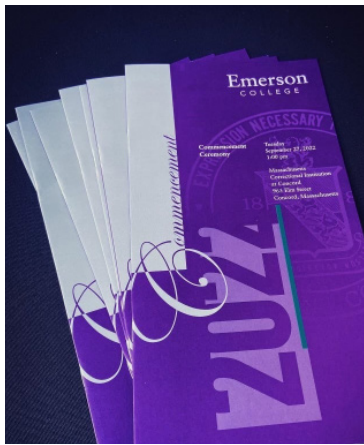
Moyer-Duncan, who taught for EPI before moving into the acting director position, shared a similar experience, describing her classroom as a “wonderfully vibrant space.”

“It was just the most alive, dynamic teaching experience I’ve ever had,” Moyer-Duncan said. “The engagement of the students was really phenomenal.”

Shane, who taught a research writing course for EPI in 2019, also noted how impressed he was by the work ethic of the students. He recalls arriving to a classroom full of students who had not only done the reading for homework, but had read it multiple times and already discussed it among themselves.

“Students in the prison initiative are the hardest working students I’ve ever had the privilege to work with,” Shane said. “That’s not knocking the work ethic of students on the Boston campus, it’s just recognizing that the students there work incredibly hard.”

Not only do EPI students bring effort and determination to their aca-



Courtesy Cara Moyer-Duncan

demics, Shane said, but they do so in the “incredibly oppressive setting” of a medium-security prison.

“It makes me feel very grateful and privileged as an instructor,” he said. “Also, it keeps me on my toes, because I’ve got to make sure I’m challenging those students when they come to class prepared to challenge me.”

On Emerson’s Boston campus, Shane currently teaches the EPI co-curricular course, a one credit, non-tuition class in which students learn about mass incarceration and higher education within the prison system. This semester, 10 students are enrolled in the class.

Students in the co-curricular course also participate in service projects in conjunction with EPI. Past students researched the stances of Massachusetts representatives on incarceration-related issues, reached out to representatives to advocate for incarcerated individuals, and transcribed a novel handwritten by an EPI student.

“I’ve seen students reaching out who are interested in [the co-curricular course]. They want to learn more about it,” Shane said. “It’s important

the college and the student body understand the impact and the importance of a program like this, and I’m really glad that students seem to be embracing it and are excited about it.”

Ana Luque, a sophomore journalism major, took the EPI co-curricular course last semester. As an international student from Honduras, she said she found the class especially thought provoking.

“I think I learned a lot,” Luque said. “I did learn about the prison system in the United States and how different it is from my country, but also how it affects everyone in the United States.”

Luque said the class changed her perspective on the prison system.

“We have such a limited understanding of the prison system based on what we’re shown in the media,” she said. “Once you start digging in deep, you get frustrated. You [realize] this is really unfair, this is not a system that is looking for rehabilitation of people.”

She added that she believes every Emerson student should take the course at some point.

“There’s a lot of things you can learn from it, and a lot of things that are affecting you, despite you not knowing,” she said. “Even if it does not directly affect you, you should at least have some compassion to learn about what happens to other people that are not part of your community.”

While Luque argued for all Emerson students to take the co-curricular, Eason made an even broader call: for all colleges and universities to implement a program like EPI.

“I just can’t imagine how the country would be different and better if every higher education institution did this also, as part of what their mission is,” Eason said. “I just think it’s incredible. It really just feels like an important thing to do.”

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Opinion

From the castle to Boston: What happens to home when you're abroad?

Sophia Pargas
Beacon Staff

As I stared out at the descending Miami skyline on my first flight back to Boston since December 2022, unease rumbled in my ribcage like the engine of the Delta Boeing 737 surrounding me. Apprehension, nervousness and excitement crowded the already-cramped economy seat, weighing atop me and claiming their spots as unwanted baggage. I was on my way to begin my first semester back to school since going abroad, and I had no clue what to expect.

The last time I felt even remotely similar, I was on a one-way flight from Boston to Amsterdam where my Kasteel Well study abroad program would begin. From there, I'd board a bus that would take me to a 14th-century castle I'd call home for 90 days. Though it was an experience straight out of a fairytale, I could not shake the unwavering feeling that I was making a mistake.

As Boston Logan International slowly faded into the distance and Amsterdam became closer by the second, I wondered if I was leaving behind more than just a city, but a life that I adored—one I had built for myself from the ground up. Amidst seatbelt signs and overpacked carry-ons and strangers fated to be friends, I questioned if life as I knew it would ever be the same.

Upon coming back to school and sparking conversations about Kasteel Well with peers who have yet to experience it, I've found



Courtesy Sophia Pargas

What I've come to learn since is that things aren't entirely the same, and that's okay. No aspect of life would look or feel or be the same. And how could it? I am not the same person I was on that plane six months ago, and I'm glad for it.

While things in Boston may not

ple do I want to associate myself with? What kind of life do I want to create for myself here? I had a clean slate, and I did not take that reality for granted.

Over the span of a year and a half, I crafted my life here with the most delicate and gentle of hands. I took pride in the way I carried myself, more confident and more outspoken than I was back home, and I found the people who brought out the best in me, friends who I felt grateful to have every day. Though it was not always easy, I had finally felt like life was exactly how it was always meant to be.

Just as this contentment and comfort settled around my soul, my inbox reminded me that sometimes the best things in life come when you least expect it.

"Congratulations, you have been accepted into the Kasteel Well Spring 2022 Program."

Or, as I read it, "Congratulations, your entire life is about to get flipped upside down."

And it did. Even despite the fear and worry, I knew there was no denying an opportunity like this one. The question was never if I was going to go, but what I'd be risking by doing so.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed that fall in Boston to the fullest, making as many memories as I could and cherishing every moment I had with the city and people I love. The closer it got to the end of the semester, the more excited I was for my next journey, but the more I feared leaving my current one. Packing my bags and leaving my suite in Piano Row, I felt as if

I were leaving something behind unfinished, like there was more I was meant to experience but just not enough time.

The next few months seemed to pass in the blink of an eye. My double in Piano Row was replaced with a quad at the top of a 14th-century tower, and the countless days I'd spent with my friends were traded for occasional FaceTime calls and text messages. While we tried to keep in touch as much as possible, the six hour time difference and life-changing excursions around the world made connections few and far between.

They had their lives and I had mine, and I like to think we all enjoyed celebrating each other's friendships from a distance, finding comfort in knowing we'd all have the next two years to rekindle and reunite.

And that is exactly what we did come September. While I once wished I would be able to say everything picked up exactly how it left off before I left, this simply wasn't the case. Things were a little more clumsy, a little more awkward, a little less natural than they had once been.

New friends had joined old circles, and I often worried my absence was scarcely felt and easily replaced. Constantly, I reminded

unnerving dread that maybe all my fears were not for nothing.

In my first month back in Boston, however, these emotions have begun to retreat slowly, gently, and peacefully. Just as time apart is what made me doubt my place, time together is what has made me feel like I belong once more.

I've been reminded of why I chose such amazing friends to begin with, and am grateful for the opportunity to grow in a deeper closeness with them. The experience made me appreciate every moment with the people I love, and made me more attuned to little moments that now mean more than ever.

And most of all, my time abroad taught me to be independent, confident, and fearless. Without the 90 days spent traveling the world and living out my youth to its absolute fullest, I never would have come to understand that life is meant to be lived day by day. They taught me that there is adventure in every crack and crevice of life, and has shown me that the most beautiful moments come when we let go and trust the process.

Going abroad and coming back has not been much different than taking a flight; the takeoff was fast, abrupt, and a little panic-in-



Courtesy Sophia Pargas

this fear of change is not exclusive to me. Mention of the program often elicited similar reservations from those who were considering signing up or chose not to for this exact reason.

"I wanted to go to the castle but I was afraid I'd miss Boston too much."

"You went to the castle? I'm considering it, but I don't want to miss out on anything when I'm gone."

"How has it been coming back? Are things the same as they were before you left?"

be exactly how they were before, studying abroad offered me an experience that shook my identity and challenged everything I once was. It made me into the kind of person who is open to change, and who is excited to rebuild and reimagine the life I left behind.

As someone who moved from Miami to Boston to attend Emerson and knew not a single soul coming in, I had the unique opportunity of a complete and utter fresh start. Freshman year was a constant internal battle: Who do I want to be? What kind of peo-

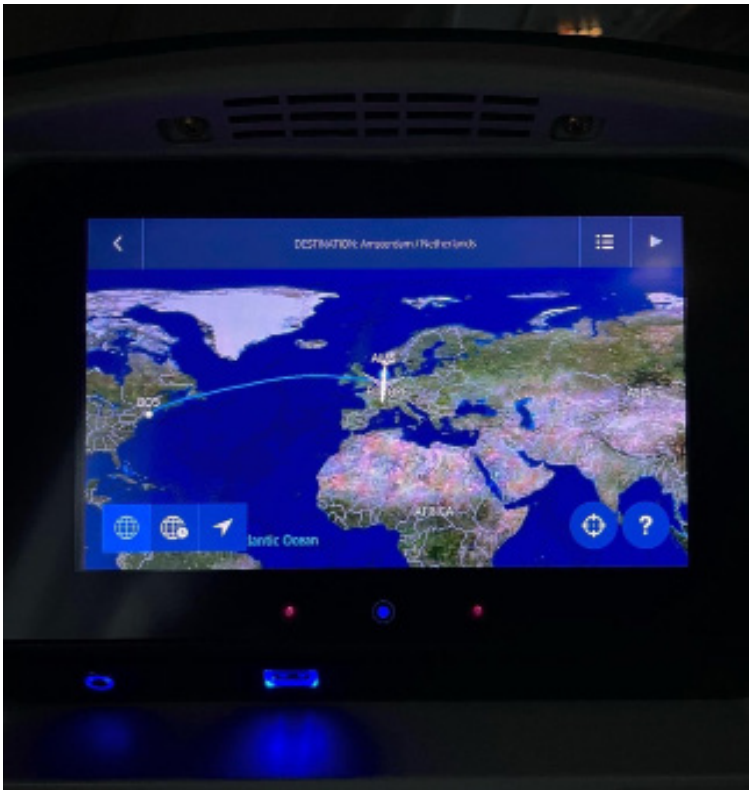
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Courtesy Sophia Pargas

myself that just as I had met new people and made new memories that were singular to me, my friends were allowed to do the same.

For a while, though, I struggled to find my new place and stressed about overstepping my welcome, unsure of how to acclimate naturally and without force. I was surrounded by some of the best friends I've ever known, yet felt an unshakeable loneliness and an

ducing, but the landing has been smooth, slow and reassuring. After a short pitstop, I'm back at my final destination and am looking forward to not picking up where I left off, but reimagining and recreating what is yet to be.

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The NFL should reevaluate its concussion protocol

Mariyam Quaisar
Beacon Staff

There were five minutes and fifteen seconds left in the second quarter of the game between the Miami Dolphins and the Cincinnati Bengals when the Dolphins’ quarterback was rushed to the hospital.

On Sept. 29, quarterback Tua Tagovailoa suffered a serious concussion when he was sacked by the Bengals’ defensive lineman Josh Tupou. Tagovailoa’s head hit the ground, causing his arms to go rigid and his fingers to curl into an involuntary position.

The popular quarterback took a similar hit four days earlier during a game against the Buffalo Bills, where he grabbed his head and stumbled as he stood back up. This first hit was originally labeled a head injury, but later attributed to Tagovailoa’s prior ankle and back injuries which supposedly caused him to stumble—a reaction considered a “gross motor instability.” Tagovailoa was cleared at halftime and permitted to finish the game.

The NFL, its players, and fans are now asking one question: How thoroughly was concussion protocol followed? The question answered itself as Tagovailoa was laid on a stretcher not even a week later.

Tagovailoa told reporters after the Bills game that his adrenaline kept him going. He insisted to the medical team, and to reporters, that his back hit the turf before his head, which was why it was difficult to maintain stability. However, it is highly likely that Tagovailoa stumbled on his way up because his head and already-weak back hit the ground almost simultaneously. The

“The NFL, its players, and fans are now asking one question: How thoroughly was concussion protocol followed?”

two back-to-back impacts on his body contributed to his loss of balance—one cannot analyze the situation without considering the hard hit his head suffered.

“He displayed neurological trauma last week, we disregarded it, labeled it a ‘back injury’ and let him back in the game,” Emmanuel Acho, former linebacker and now-analyst on Fox Sports, said in a tweet. “When will we put player safety FIRST!”

Chris Nowinski, the CEO of the Concussion Legacy Foundation who has a doctorate in behavioral neuroscience, said he saw clear signs of a concussion—loss of vision and balance—during the Bills game, and Tagovailoa should never have been cleared to continue playing.

“You never want to return a play-

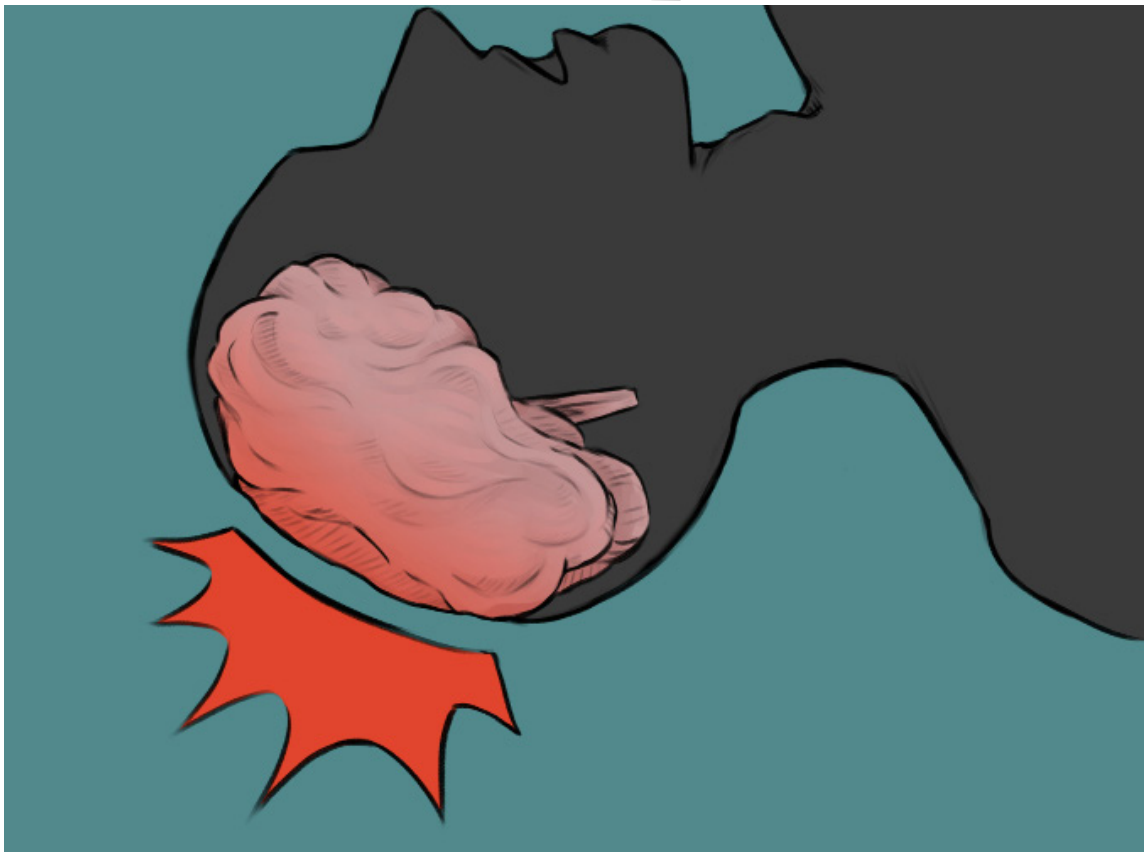


Illustration Rachel Choi

er because you can die from Second Impact Syndrome or you can get a second concussion that changes your life,” he said in an interview with ABC News.

Following the first hit, Tagovailoa was listed as “DNP,” did not participate, because of back and ankle injuries—the same ones that supposedly caused him to stumble. He was made available to play on the morning of Sept. 29, and suffered the second hit later that day. It appears the coaches had him rest a few days to make sure his head was OK, then labeled it as ankle and back recovery to downplay their own fears. Nonetheless, he went back onto the field too soon—a disastrous step for the player and his coaching staff.

“If he has a second concussion that destroys his season or career, everyone involved will be sued and should lose their jobs, coaches included,” Nowinski tweeted four hours before the Bengals game. “We all saw it, even they must know this isn’t right.”

While concussions are common in football games, it is necessary to follow protocol regardless of how important a player is to the game. That player won’t be too valuable if they are not medically treated in the best way possible. Brain injuries, especially, can be extremely detrimental to not only an athlete’s playing ability but also their quality of life.

Dolphins coach Mike McDaniel told reporters watching his quarterback on the field was “an emotional moment,” but was relieved that “he didn’t have anything more serious than a concussion.”

Who said concussions are not serious? Especially when your concussed player is lying on the field in a contorted position due to a brain injury.

“A concussion is a traumatic brain injury and posturing suggests brain stem injury,” Nowinski said in a tweet. “It’s pretty high on the list of serious medical consequences of football.”

Tagovailoa’s arms and fingers going rigid proves concussion protocol was not followed to its full extent. Moreover, it is clear the medical team made serious mistakes because the independent neurotrauma consultant who cleared Tagovailoa was fired.

In January 2017, the Dolphins were cited for failing to follow concussion protocol when then-quar-

“While concussions are common in football games, it is necessary to follow protocol regardless of how important a player is to the game. That player won’t be too valuable if they are not medically treated in the best way possible.”

terback Matt Moore was cleared to re-enter a game versus the Pittsburgh Steelers after he was slammed onto the ground by linebacker Bud Dupree.

Moore was bleeding from the mouth—a symptom that requires

further evaluation in the locker room—yet he remained on the sideline with the medical team over the duration of one play before he returned to the field. Moore was unable to stand for two minutes before he was put back in.

Athletes often downplay injuries so they can continue living up to their fans’ expectations. Professional athletes especially live and breathe their game, so it is up to their medical team and coaches to take charge and prohibit them from continuing if it is dangerous.

Of course, Tagovailoa must also take responsibility for not taking his injury seriously, but an athlete’s mindset is clouded when they are in the midst of an important game. It’s their job to play, just like it is a team physician’s job to diagnose with jurisdiction regardless of how “annoyed” a player gets with the amount of questions he is asked, and regardless of how adamant he is about a diagnosis that he does not have expertise in.

Nowinski told ABC News that while there is increased awareness of concussions, the NFL must be more thorough when it comes to preventing these injuries.

“The NFL for the last 15 years has been trying to minimize the role of on-field signs of a concussion so that they would retain flexibility in returning someone to play if they seem cognitively sound enough in the locker room to go back into the game,” Nowinski said. “This is where it bit them in the butt.”

When Tagovailoa’s fingers curled during the Bengals game, they went into a “fencing response,” an involuntary neurological response to a significant concussive event where the forearms go rigid and position themselves outward. He was taken to University of Cincinnati Hospital, where he underwent testing that showed no structural damage to the head or neck area. Tagovailoa left Cincinnati with the rest of his team “in good spirits” for South Florida, and will undergo an MRI to more thoroughly evaluate his injuries. He will also go through a five-step process as part of the concussion protocol which will gradually work his body until he is cleared for full football activity.

The fact that Tagovailoa is not seriously hurt is a miracle, but that does not mean the events he faced can be forgotten. The NFL Players Association will hold a joint inves-

tigation into the handling of Tagovailoa’s injury from the Bills game, which may take up to two weeks. The NFL and NFLPA stated in a joint statement that necessary modifications will be made to the protocol to enhance player safety.

At the end of the day, following concussion protocol to its fullest extent is more important than winning a game. Tagovailoa’s case is one of too many, and luckily ended better than it could have.

A similar medical emergency happened with the Arizona Cardinals’ defensive end J.J. Watt, who went into atrial fibrillation on Sept. 28. Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heartbeat that can lead to blood clots in the heart. Watt’s heart was shocked back into rhythm on Sept. 29, and he played a game against the Carolina Panthers three days later. How is it possible that somebody whose heart was literally shocked back to normal was allowed to pick up a football in just a matter of days?

Players’ safety needs to be taken more seriously, especially in cases like Watt and Tagovailoa. It is up to the coaching staff to recognize when a player needs more recovery time.

Five years have passed since Moore’s blood was wiped and he was sent back to finish a game. How has the NFL not learned basic human safety in the past five years? Winning a game won’t seem so important when your player’s heart suffers from a blood clot or their body gets paralyzed.

The NFL is the most watched professional sports league in America, and players make millions putting their bodies on the line in pur-

“Who said concussions are not serious? Especially when your concussed player is lying on the field in a contorted position due to a brain injury.”

suit of victory. How long will such a popular sport happily advertise dangerous play?

Football is the heart of America, but the consistent news of concussions and hard hits are pushing parents to enroll their children in soccer and baseball instead. Scholastic football programs are drastically shrinking, which is motivating the NFL to spend millions on convincing parents the game can be made safer. So, when exactly will that happen?

Making millions of dollars means nothing if you’re not alive to claim it.

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Living Arts

Sustainable Swaps: saving the environment one trade at a time

Max Handelman
Beacon Correspondent

The crisp wind of nearing autumn rustled through rows upon rows of hanging clothing, creating a chorus of rattling hangers and a symphony of flutters from anything folded on the ground.

In one direction, a neon green skirt was exchanged for a pair of distressed jeans. In another, live music added to the hearty atmosphere for the droves of students and curious onlookers passing by. It was the perfect setting for Sustainable Swaps’ first event of the year, “Feelin Fall-ish,” held on Oct. 2, at Frog Pond.

Mireya Zellner, a junior marketing communications major, blended her creative ingenuity and passion for thrifting by founding the organization in October 2021.

The event was initially meant to be a casual gathering for Zellner and her friends to trade clothes and possibly profit from eco-friendly fashion.

“When I first started this it was 15 kids swapping clothes,” Zellner said in an interview with The Beacon. “We had a little Google Doc flier and it was just a fun idea.”

What started off as a simple passion project exploded in popularity within the past year and a half, with an estimated 200 to 300 people participating in each event.

The events themselves are like a modern day Byzantine bazaar: Any-



Flier for Sustainable Swaps event. / *Courtesy* Mireya Zellner

one and everyone is allowed to set up shop to buy or barter clothes. Since Sustainable Swaps is non- Emerson affiliated, the events are open to

other schools as well as the general public. Large bustling crowds course through lines of vendors down the road, all of whom contribute to each

event’s festive environment.

“It’s like a decentralized gathering of homies on their picnic blankets, trading clothes, and saving the environment,” Zellner said.

Zellner’s inspiration for Sustainable Swaps stemmed from her love of environmental sustainability and human rights activism. Specifically, the organization’s primary goal is combating the growing effects of “fast fashion.”

Fast fashion, as Zellner described, is when a brand prioritizes speed and quantity over quality clothing and ethical working conditions. In recent years, these brands’ methods of production have caused rising concern regarding issues of environmentally destructive and inhumane practices.

“Companies will outsource to different lower-income countries to avoid certain working regulations,” Zellner said. “The working conditions are horrible and workers are underpaid and overworked. It’s just not safe.”

Companies like GAP and Adidas have recently been under scrutiny for their continued use of sweatshops. The two were exposed for the use of child labor in countries like the Philippines and Bangladesh, back in the years of 2004 and 2000 respectively.

By recycling old clothes and giving them new homes to other students, Zellner and all who attend her swaps help prevent further ecological damage. Each repurposed item

helps cut down on the 92 million tons of wasted synthetic material that ends up in landfills and erodes to form greenhouse gasses.

To ensure no piece of clothing ends up trashed, Zellner donates anything left over from each event to the St. Francis homeless shelter to be distributed.

“It’s really nice to interact with a lot of the people who live [at the shelter] and it’s the best feeling to see the impact the clothes would have on someone else,” Zellner said.

In addition to prioritizing sustainability, Sustainable Swaps is economically friendly. Brand-name sustainable clothing is often very expensive, costing upwards of around two and a half or four times as much as regular clothes. Sustainable Swaps offers a more affordable alternative for anyone wishing to be more mindful about their carbon footprint.

The organization has been met with an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from attendees.

“Overall I think it’s a really good thing,” said junior Josie Arthur, a frequent music performer at the event. “A lot of people at Emerson are stylish and people want to get rid of their clothes and buy clothes too, and it’s all for a good goal.”

Given its current and increasing popularity, Zellner hopes Sustainable Swaps can be integrated into the actual school as some kind of biannual event. But for now, the organization

How a miscarriage can lead to an unjust arrest

Cont. from Pg. 1

Through a six-year process, Escher followed the lives and stories of the women, especially Vásquez.

Throughout the film, audiences follow Vásquez’s journey to freedom as she disputed her case in court. She was eventually granted freedom with the help of human rights organizations. Following her release, Vásquez beams with joy as she is reunited with her teenage son, while bidding tearful goodbyes to her incarcerated sisters whom she felt guilty leaving behind.

In an emotional scene later in the film, Vásquez is reunited with her friends who were still serving their sentences.

For many viewers, seeing a film bring light to such important issues is refreshing, given that controversial subjects such as abortion are often neglected in cinema.

“I found the documentary to be a very personal narrative for the women of El Salvador,” audience member Maya Klaus, a female from Polish descent who was born and raised in America, said. “Concentrating on a small population of women whose human rights are continuously violated as they are criminalized for abortion wrongfully is insanely disheartening. Seeing women face 30-plus years in prison for miscarriages is a harsh reality and in no way dystopian when a country is founded on a broken system especially when Catholicism is in the mix.”

With the recent overturning of Roe v. Wade, “Fly So Far” is more urgent than ever. As El Salvador is one of the country’s with the strictest abortion laws, it shows the possibilities of a United States in which there is limited bodily autonomy.



Courtesy

The film is one of many in Bright Lights Cinema Series for fall 2022. It was co-presented as part of Cinefest Latino with the Boston Women’s Film Festival, Roxbury International Film Festival, and GlobeDocs.

In an interview with The Beacon, Bright Lights founder Anna Feder shares why and how they chose to screen the powerful documentary.

“It’s an opportune time to have a conversation about abortion access and what that means, where it’s been restricted abroad, and what that means for a possible future for us in the United States given that those rights are being taken away,” she said.

For some—even those who don’t identify as Salvadoran—the film hits close to home.

“The documentary made me think of my own family in Poland, my younger cousins who are restricted access to a vital procedure, and how there’s little movement forward for those able to get an abortion,” Klaus said. “I have the basic human right to receive such a procedure but many must fight for it, like the 17 [imprisoned in El Salvador].”

Given the content of the film and its criticism of the Salvadoran government, Escher received backlash for its release and was even shunned from screening her documentary in Salvadoran cinemas.

“The film leaked to Evangelical groups. They made a threatening letter to the cinema, saying that if they showed the film in the cinema they would sue,” Escher said. “Around

13 pro-life Evangelical organizations signed the letter and the cinema had to take down our film, therefore we couldn’t show our film in the cinema. Despite having the certificate from the government, these pro-life groups managed to censor our film.”

However, Escher is not letting this censorship stop her from trying to spread the word about the 17 women and have her film broadcasted in other countries, including El Salvador.

“Now we are making a campaign so people know the film has been censored. The groups who want to keep abortion criminalized are the same groups who censored our film. We can see that they have a lot of power and influence.”

Currently, nine out of the 17 women are still imprisoned today. In El

Salvador, 181 women have been criminalized due to the abortion ban.

Escher states that The Citizen Group for Decriminalizing Abortion is working with human rights lawyers to defend the case of the 17. Also, “Mujeres Libres,” an organization created by Vásquez, helps the women integrate into society following their release. It helps the women support one another—like they did in prison—through scholarship donations, housing, finding jobs, and getting access to healthcare. It was created for and by the 17.

“I am a Salvadorean woman and the law against abortion goes through my body,” Escher said in her director’s statement. “This is my way of contributing to their struggle for free-

‘Smile’ will make you grin and grimace

Ryan Yau
Beacon Correspondent

This article contains spoilers.

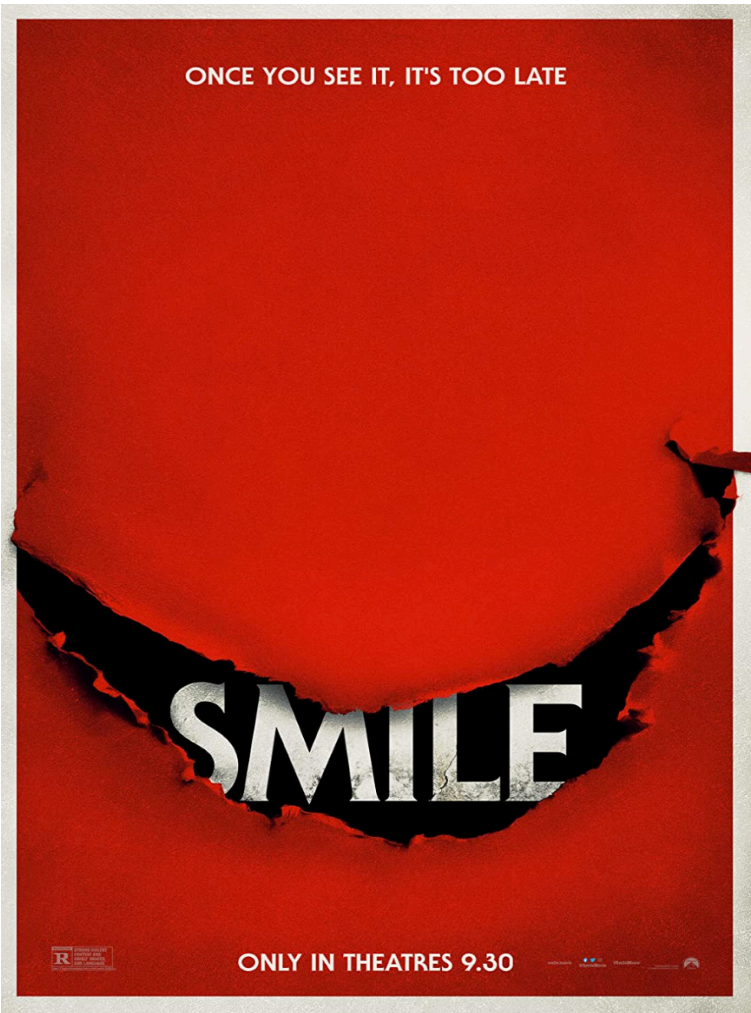
Parker Finn’s feature directorial debut “Smile” is a genre relic. In the post-streaming, post-COVID era of cinema, audiences are excited for high-tempo horror in a way they haven’t been since the 2000s. Seats were packed in the Boston Common AMC on opening night, and the movie earned \$22 million at the Box Office over the weekend.

The film opens on a therapy session between a woman and her doctor. The woman says she is being followed by a demon who assumes the forms of those she knows, and has been telling her when she is going to die: today. The demon’s tell is an uncanny, inhuman smile.

The woman then flashes an uncanny, inhuman smile, and dies as foretold. Our protagonist, Dr. Rose Cotter—played by Sosie Bacon—is naturally shaken by the events, but soon learns that she has been cursed with the same affliction and is merely the next in a long lineage of suicides.

In a way, “Smile” sets up the perfect amalgam horror premise, combining every classic genre fear: being stuck in a waking nightmare, being aware of your own death, being a victim out of fortuity, and not knowing who to trust, even yourself. In this way, it’s not entirely unique—even its central eerie smile motif is a trope of late-2010s horror, notorious for looking overly goofy.

The demon is a somewhat banal metaphor for trauma, the idea being that witnessing suicide passes on the demon from one victim to another. But the metaphor is a horror cliché of the past 10 years, and no less un-



Film poster for “Smile.” / Courtesy Madeline Morin

teresting in this context. Concurrently Cotter is revealed to hold her own trauma of having to take care of her dying mother as a young girl, from whom she received significant abuse.

Bacon’s performance is the glue holding the movie together, perfectly portraying the progression from

skepticism to mania without hamming it up. Supporting roles from Jessie T. Usher as her fiancé and Caitlyn Stasey as her sister provide outside perspectives, allowing for ambiguity on whether what we see happening is real.

Following the initial encounter in

therapy, the film revolves around Cotter struggling to decipher the events and come to terms with the seeming insurmountability of avoiding the curse. However, the sequence of revelations presented are telegraphed so obviously they become obnoxious, to the point that no significant narrative shift holds any shock value.

One scene that takes place at her nephew’s birthday party is a frustrating example. In a night of delirium, Cotter loses her cat. The movie then suddenly cuts to the party without transition, and she shows up with an inexplicable present. It doesn’t take much effort to piece together what is happening, but the camera frustratingly draws out every reaction as to hammer the revelation as hard as possible.

Even after a well-acted scene in which a child pulls a dead cat from a box, the movie feels the need to close up on the cat’s name tag, unhelpfully attributing the corpse to the name of a cat we already knew to be missing.

What saves the movie is an earnest dedication to subversion. Finn is familiar with the language of modern-day horror and weaponizes it to scare the audience.

Every single ominous camera technique is employed. Is the demon at the edge of this slow pan? Behind this close-up of the protagonist? At the end of this tight hallway? Usually, the answer is no. A favorite gag of Finn’s is to establish the elements of a scare, fizzle out, then jolt the audience with a loud noise through an unrelated, comically mundane cut.

One notable sequence of shots sets up three separate scares by sweeping across a bedroom with far too many corridors—of course, none of which come into play, but it’s these setup-and-baits that bolster the real scares

in the final leg of the film.

Cotter realizes she has to end the cycle by killing herself in a way that leaves no witnesses. So, she poetically travels to her childhood home, the source of her non-demonic trauma. However, it is there that she encounters the demon in the form of her dead mother, begging her to help. She’s swayed, but ultimately chooses to prioritize her mental health over her desire to help others.

But that’s only the beginning of what must be the wildest, most elliptical dream-sequence ending of the year. Her mother morphs into a tall, deformed monster and we get a hide-and-seek sequence around the suddenly labyrinthine house. The demon approaches Cotter, inexplicably becomes an H.R. Giger monster, and tries to enter her mouth in the most gruesome possible depiction of repression. She resists and sets trauma incarnate on fire, taking it and the house down with her.

What “Smile” needs more of is this brand of audacity, to do away with the self-seriousness of its albeit serious premise and to lean more into its absurdity. The formal presentation of the film is strong and its story progression, while predictable, is solid, but there were many moments that felt played safe despite the potential of its setup. But for those seeking a played-straight carnival of frights, it well delivers.

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Emerson Mafia admin debuts new merchandise fundraiser

Bryan Liu
Beacon Correspondent

While Emerson Mafia is often known solely as a means of networking, it has now expanded its community and fundraising efforts in a unique way: merchandise.

Michael Benko ‘09 recently created an Emerson Mafia merchandise line of customized t-shirts for fellow alum to purchase and show their Lion pride. All profits go towards community outreach such as events that connect Emerson graduates together.

Benko jokes that his eureka moment came when the higher-ups ordered him to print shirts in an Alice in Wonderland-esque fever dream adventure.

“When I was a senior at Emerson, I found a secret passageway under the Little Building, so I went down there and I was inducted into the real Emerson Mafia and the dons of the Mafia instructed me to sell T-shirts to fund their fight against the Illuminati,” Benko said. “That was part of the joke, but I wish it wasn’t.”

In reality, he just wanted a product that would uplift the community and bring people together.

“I’d say that having a flag is a very human concept,” said Benko, who has been an active member since 2007. “And it’s something people immediately get whether it’s a T-shirt, a pin, or a hat. It’s wonderful when a piece of cloth can transfer unity. You just feel special.”

Writing professor and fellow alum Peter Medeiros (’11) agrees with this sentiment.

“People like to have uniforms associated with the groups that they’re in,” said Medeiros. “I don’t know if it would increase the popularity of the club to outsiders but I think it’s something that people who are



Shirt from Emerson Mafia merchandise line. / Courtesy Michael Benko

usually part of an in-group would usually enjoy the same way people enjoy putting on a sports jersey.”

In recent years, the Mafia has taken to social media and since soared to new heights. To Benko, the Mafia embodies a “cultural idea” that was being spread person to person even before the internet. Digitalizing the idea legitimized the organization.

“As the internet came about, [the Mafia] started to become a shareable internet concept like a meme,” said Benko. “After a while, all the time we spent to foster the community

turned it from something that’s sort of a meme into something that’s a real club.”

In addition to the online efforts, Benko launched the merch line because he believes good funding will streamline the Mafia’s agenda. He quips that Emerson really does make sure that they’re trying to help their students after graduation—and so is he.

“I’d love to have a real moderate budget coming in so I could justify spending three days or a month or a few weeks working with campus or-

ganizations to help current students,” said Benko.

Benko has made it clear that all the funds from sales would be invested back into the community.

“I would love to help students who are graduating into what’s become a very strange world and help them get their footing,” Benko said. “Or not even new graduates, but also someone who’s making a career transition when they’re 55. If we can have a space that is sort of unofficial and underground, where people can freely talk and meet. That’s awesome.”

In the process of creating the merch, Benko was inspired by the longevity of old clothes and excited by the idea of practicing sustainability in the line.

“I wanted to create merchandise that would be good quality, because I remember when I was younger growing up, the T-shirts seemed to last forever. Now you wash them like three times and it’s ruined, I hate that,” he adds.

Benko partnered with Bonfire as the printing partner because of their quality and consistency over other standard T-shirts.

“It’s more expensive, because it’s made a lot better,” Benko said. “It’s usually sold as a premium T-shirt in a gift shop. If you see a shirt that’s like \$37, or \$50, it might be printed on this one. So this is going to wash a lot better and be a lot more comfortable.”

The Mafia shirts sell for 27 dollars. Benko makes it a point to maintain a low profit margin so the shirts can still be affordable. And although the first attempt “was not a successful project,” Benko called it a “huge learning experience.” After several rounds of trial and error, he is finally excited to be able to rep the organization.

All in all, the project’s mission is

to strengthen the Emerson Mafia, an organization known for the opportunities it provides for alum across the world. A backdoor connection goes a long way in regards to a life in media or film, and a lot of students don’t have that. That’s where the Mafia comes in.

“A lot of arts are insider industries, where if you don’t have that [connection], it’s going to be really, really, really hard for you,” Benko said.

For many, the Mafia levels out the playing field by giving its members a home-court advantage in nearly every field.

“No membership in any organization like this is going to guarantee you a job,” Medeiros admits, “but Emerson has a lot of fingers in various industries and I think that’s been helpful to see and useful in terms of making connections.”

The organization provides scaffolding for post-grads like Medeiros before they find their niche in an industry.

“[The Mafia] was helping me get into a lot of freelance work particularly early on when I was still in grad school,” Medeiros said.

Benko plans to partner with the Emerson bookstore so students and their families can walk in and buy the shirt on campus. People would be willing to invest in a piece of merchandise to support the project if they value the community, he says.

“I sort of think that in Los Angeles, having this on a film set would be really fun,” Benko said. “I think in the dorms, having this would be really fun. But I’m sort of looking to the community to see if they feel the same way.”

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Sports



Couresty Shannon Norton

Alum finds traction in WNBA and NBA G League

Leo Kagan
Beacon Staff

Emerson alum Shannon Norton '13 is climbing the ranks in professional basketball management, aspiring to be a part of the development of women's sports at the professional level. Norton played three seasons on Emerson's women's basketball team and served as the team's assistant coach for four more. As a player, she finished top-10 in career assists and 3-pointers made, and she helped coach the Lions to three NEWMAC playoff appearances. She was recently promoted to Operations Coordinator for the WNBA's Indiana Fever and the NBA G League's Fort Wayne Mad Ants after just being hired in April as the equipment manager, which she explains provides some much-needed job security. "A lot of [these] positions are seasonal," she said. "There's not a lot of full-time people except for the higher-ups and the head coaches." Norton, however, set herself apart with a strong work ethic and attention to detail, piquing the interest of fellow alum Chris Taylor '11, the General Manager for the Mad Ants. Taylor invited Norton to work with the Mad Ants, lead-

ing to a full-time position. She is now responsible for a variety of duties from equipment management, travel planning, and keeping statistics during games. One of the most interesting aspects of her job, she says, is her proximity to the coaching staff. "I have a coaching background and I've always been interested in that," she said. "[Management] likes that and they allow me to be in coaches' meetings. I get to see game plans [and] I'm in on pre-game, halftime, postgame talks with the team. I don't think that's something a lot of equipment managers get to do in the league." Norton isn't just a spectator to these coaches meetings, she's also contributing to key decisions. "I [track] our lineup efficiency, which players are playing well together," she said. "I keep that during the game so that I can tell our assistant coach at halftime." Norton gained experience watching and analyzing players as an assistant coach on Emerson. She joined Head Coach Bill Gould's 2018 women's basketball team after coaching for two seasons at Cal Tech. Gould says Norton developed into an excellent coach while he worked with her. "She moved from just knowing [basketball] and doing it to becoming a really good teach-

er," Gould said. "That's not easy to do. That's why you hear [that] sometimes great players don't make great coaches. Shannon... really became both." Gould added that Norton was always a team player, referencing a game in Norton's senior year where she tallied a career-high 23 points against her former team, the Suffolk University Rams. Gould said Norton was playing to prove that the Rams—who used her sparingly in her lone season at Suffolk—had been wrong to let her go. "She had a really good game and was clearly a factor in the win against Suffolk," he said. "She played a big part and there's no question, there was some extra motivation. But the game wasn't selfish by any stretch. She wanted to prove [that], 'You guys [Suffolk] made a mistake.'" Norton brings the same unselfish nature to her new position, serving multiple roles for the Fever and the Mad Ants. "[I do] all the little things people wouldn't necessarily think of," she said. "Anything that pops up with the players, they come to me or our [Director of Basketball Operations] and we handle any inconveniences." Norton is happy about her new full-time role, but she also has an eye on the future. "I think it's going to come down to my decision on which path I'd rather take," she said. "Whether I'll be in operations, managing a team, or if I want to jump back into coaching. I might have to go back to [the collegiate level] to gain a little more experience." Her ultimate goal is to help expand the prevalence of women's sports at the professional level. While she originally sought to prove to others she could take up space in a male-dominated profession, Norton said her intentions have since shifted. "My main goal in coming here was to work for the WNBA and empower women," she said. "Right now, it would be more empowering to help build up the WNBA. Even if I have a small role right now, hopefully I can climb the ladder and be in a bigger role to make changes within it."



Couresty Shannon Norton

“I just want to help the team win”: Salti puts on the gloves and steps into the goal

Cont. from Pg. 1

"This is what you dream about," she said. "12-year-old me would be freaking out knowing that I'm playing two sports [in college]." Her transition back into the net was smooth, according to Suvak, specifically in the technical aspect. "[Assistant coach Colin Connolly] spends time working with our goalkeepers on a range of skills," Suvak said. "Colin has been working with her to bring her back to pace and she has been excelling at those things." However, joining the team hasn't come without its fair share of challenges. While some skills came back quickly, Salti still finds herself working to improve others. "The biggest challenge is passing with my feet," she said. "My hands and saving stuff came back the easiest because I catch balls in basketball. The diving, slowly that's come back as well but the play with my feet [...] when we do possession drills, I'm like, 'Sorry in advance, everyone.'" One challenge Salti didn't have to face, however, was that of joining a team full of unfamiliar faces. "Joining a new team where everybody's close is never something that you necessarily look forward to," she said. "It's gonna take time to get integrated. But I was already hanging out with [the team] regardless, even though I was on the basketball team." Salti is close with a number of players on the soccer team, including junior forward Brittney Righetti, who says that she's en-

joyed getting to play with Salti. "It's been really fun to play with her," Righetti said. "I would always go to her basketball games and she used to come to every soccer game last year. To have her on the sideline with me and the whole team, it's been really great." According to Righetti, Salti is dual parts motivator and comedian. "She gives us a lot of comedic relief," Righetti said. "She's a very funny player. She's also really great at motivating our team, building us up, and being very positive. Before games she's like 'This is our home, let's bring it to them.'" Salti has also grown close with sophomore Amara Schaub, the team's starting goalkeeper. Schaub says that she likes having another goalie to push her in practice. "You should never be comfortable in your position," she said. "You always want to be better." Suvak believes this competition is important and feels Salti is fitting into her role well. "She's playing an important role as a second goalkeeper on this team," Suvak said. "She is a natural leader and she's vocal about what she thinks should be happening for the team. She can get the team very excited and pretty pumped up." Her teammates and coaches may call her a motivator and a locker room presence, but Salti thinks of herself purely as a competitor. "I just want to help the team win," she said. "We're gonna go pretty far if we all buy in, and I think we're all bought in."

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